



# Using German Civil Registration Records

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*Civil registration records are a major resource for documenting German ancestors. They often provide more detailed information than religious records. Updated laws allow for easier access to these records, including physical and online archives. They are kept by the local civil registration office. There are no official national or regional indexes, so the town where an event occurred must be known.*

## MEYERS GAZETTEER

The gazetteer “*Meyers Orts- und Verkehrslexikon*”, published in 1912, is used by FamilySearch as the standard for cataloging German resources. An easy-to-use version is available online at <https://www.meyersgaz.org> . Advantages include:

- English interface
- Diacritics not needed
- Accepts multiple wild cards in the search term
- Original entry is shown
- Explanations in English
- Many entries are linked to a historical map
- Under “ecclesiastical” churches and parishes for a 20-mile radius are shown
- Option to submit e-mail address for purposes of collaboration with others who work in the same town

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1792 *Zivilstandsregister* introduced in France
- 1798 to 1808 spread throughout Western Germany
- After 1812 abolished in many regions
- 1812 to 1875 Church record duplicates
- Oct 1874 Prussia requires civil registration
- 1 Jan 1876 Civil registration required country-wide
- 2009 civil registration laws revised

The records are generally written in old Gothic script. Several classes found in the FamilySearch Learning Center, found under “Get help” on the top right of the home page, help researchers become familiar with this handwriting style and learn to read key information in the records. Another good learning tool is [www.script.byu.edu](http://www.script.byu.edu) .

## 2009 CIVIL REGISTRATION LAW

The 2009 revision of the law governing civil registration provides for the following records to be kept electronically:

- Birth registers – public after 110 years
- Marriage register – public after 80 years
- Life partnership register
- Death register – public after 30 years

Access to information from non-public records is available only to the person(s) to whom the record pertains and their **direct** ancestors and descendants. Older records are increasingly more available online and in special archives (*Personenstandsarchive*) and easier to obtain by mail.

## CIVIL REGISTRATION BEGINNING IN 1876

Beginning 1 Jan 1876, civil registration was required throughout the German Empire. Standard forms were used, and records were kept in duplicate. Originals may be called “*Erstschriften*”, and duplicates “*Zweitschriften*”. In addition, each couple was given a *Familienstammbuch* (family heritage book) at the time of marriage, into which certified copies of records pertaining to the family were entered.

Information included:

- Birth: #, date/ place recorded, Informant name, age, occupation, residence, mother's name, status, religion, residence, child's birth date/ place, name, signatures, marginal notes
- Marriage: #, date/place recorded, for groom and bride: names, occupation, residence, age, birth place, parents, witnesses with name, occupation, age, residence
- Death: #, date/place recorded, informant(s) name, age, residence, other details, deceased's name, age, occupation, residence, and other known information (varies), witnesses with name, occupation, age, residence

## CIVIL REGISTRATION RECORDS ONLINE

- [FamilySearch Records](https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/location/1927074?region=Germany): Hessen, Kreis Steinburg, Schleswig-Holstein, parish register duplicates, see <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/location/1927074?region=Germany>
- [Ancestry](http://www.ancestry.de/cs/recent-collections): Berlin, many other cities and regions, see <http://www.ancestry.de/cs/recent-collections> or search the catalog
- [GenWiki](http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/Kategorie:Online-Personenstandsregister): Online-Personenstandsregister, see <http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/Kategorie:Online-Personenstandsregister>
- [Familia-Austria](https://www.familia-austria.at/index.php/forschung-und-service/netzrecherche/111-matriken-im-netz): Matriken im Netz, see <https://www.familia-austria.at/index.php/forschung-und-service/netzrecherche/111-matriken-im-netz>
- Polish archives: [Lost Shoebox](http://www.lostshoebox.com/), [FamilySearch Wiki](http://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Poland), see <http://www.lostshoebox.com/> and <https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Poland> [Online Genealogy Records](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Poland)
- Alsace-Lorraine: Departmental archives websites, see <https://francearchives.fr/fr/map/b2b076144a3c4392a34b14bb5e364c95>

## CHURCH RECORD DUPLICATES

- Generally begin in 1808, sometimes earlier
- Created by the pastor
- Sometimes labelled “civil”
- Format varies: paragraphs or columns
- May be arranged by year or record type
- May include entries for non-members not contained in the original church book

Some available online

- FamilySearch Records
- Baden-Wuerttemberg state archives (Search for “Standesbücher 1810-1870”)

## “NAPOLEONIC FORMAT”

- Earlier records from 1792 onward
- Written in longhand
- Standard phrasing
- Includes indexes
- Births, marriage proclamations, marriages, deaths

For more information, see [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany\\_Civil\\_Registration](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Civil_Registration)

Marriage proclamations may be helpful, if the actual marriage is not found.

- Usually announced twice
- Announced in both towns
- May be recorded in a separate register
- Usually not indexed
- Information included similar to marriage record
- Available in some areas of Germany

Heiratsbelege (Marriage documents)

- Birth/ baptism records for both spouses
- Death records for deceased parents
- Death records for previous spouses
- Copy of proclamation paper
- Other documentation
- May only include non-local documents (Local records referenced in the marriage entry)
- “*Offenkundbarkeitsschein*” - affidavit

## USING CIVIL AND CHURCH RECORDS TOGETHER

- Civil records may be included with church records. Check out any collection where the same time period is covered more than once for the same locality.
- Civil and church records may provide additional information

- Civil registration includes everyone, regardless of religion. Different information is provided in each record type. One may be easier to use than the other. Civil records are more often indexed. Conclusion: **Use both!**

## THE FAMILIENSTAMMBUCH

- Given to a couple at marriage beginning in 1876 (formats vary)
- Holder to present the book when births, marriages, deaths are recorded
- Serves as another form of documentation
- May include pages to record ancestors and family history

## WRITING FOR RECORDS

Today's jurisdictions often differ from those given in Meyers gazetteer. Several formerly independent localities may now share administration under a new name. The town website, German Wikipedia, and the GOV gazetteer and the Gen Wiki on [www.compgen.de](http://www.compgen.de) are good resources to learn more about a locality. Electronic translation ( [www.translate.google.com](http://www.translate.google.com) ) may be helpful.

To locate a civil registration office, use a German-language search engine (i.e. [www.google.de](http://www.google.de)) and type “ ‘town name’ + *Standesamt*” into the search field. Look for a result that includes the town name first (town website). Look for *Rathaus*, *Standesamt*, *Bürgerbüro*, or *Bürgerservice*. Another option is to look for “*Kontakt*”.

Write in German or simple English. Ask for one or two records and how you can pay for them. Specify that you need a complete extract or photocopy. E-mail often gets good results.

For a German letter-writing guide see

[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/German\\_Letter\\_Writing\\_Guide](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/German_Letter_Writing_Guide) .